

3 March 2026

Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister

Urgent: Financial redress for Patients Harmed by Pelvic Mesh and Valproate

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you directly regarding the urgent and unresolved issue of financial redress for the thousands of patients and families harmed by pelvic mesh and valproate.

It has now been over two years since the publication of the Hughes Report in February 2024, which set out ten clear recommendations for redress for those affected. That report followed formal advice to the Department of Health and Social Care in October 2023.

Despite sustained engagement and ministerial acknowledgement that financial redress forms part of the Government's considerations, there remains no timetable for delivery.

Patients and families affected have experienced prolonged, avoidable harm to their physical and mental health as a result of systemic failures and a breakdown in informed consent.

Valproate, while a vital treatment for epilepsy and bipolar disorder, has caused devastating harm when taken during pregnancy. The number of children exposed to valproate in utero since its 1973 licensing is difficult to estimate. However, a central estimate suggests that around 14,000 children were harmed by exposure between 1973 and 2017 in England alone. The complex and lifelong nature of the harm associated with prenatal exposure means that today thousands of children, young people and adults are unable to live independently. Many parents have been forced to give up employment in order to provide full-time care, with profound financial and emotional consequences for entire families.

Pelvic mesh procedures, used to treat stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse, are estimated to have harmed around 10,000 patients. Patients have experienced severe complications, including debilitating chronic pain, loss of mobility, and significant psychological trauma. For many, this has resulted in the loss of careers, livelihoods, independence and relationships.

I welcome DHSC Ministers' commitment to grip the issues contained in the Hughes report. Similarly, I was pleased to see that other departments including Number 10 and HM Treasury had received briefings on the Hughes Report, when I used my powers under the

Medicines and Medical Devices Act 2021, to request further information from the Department of Health and Social Care.

Whilst progress on non-financial aspects of redress is welcome, acknowledgement without action does not provide justice. Patients' lives do not stand still while departments debate jurisdiction and process. The continued absence of a clear timetable for financial compensation compounds the harm already suffered.

As the authority to deliver financial compensation rests with HM Treasury and Number 10, decisive leadership from the centre of Government is now essential. The Hughes Report recommended both interim and main financial redress schemes that are straightforward, non-adversarial, based on an assumption of truth, and administered by an independent body trusted by patients. These proposals provide a credible and compassionate route forward.

I urge you to ensure that a clear timetable is set and that financial redress is delivered without further delay.

I look forward to your response and working constructively together to secure the just and timely resolution that patients and their families have waited far too long to receive.

I am copying this letter to Wes Streeting, Zubir Ahmed, Sharon Hodgson, Anna Dixon and Rosena Allin-Khan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henrietta'.

Professor Henrietta Hughes OBE FRCGP SFFMLM

Patient Safety Commissioner